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August 1, 1992

Issue #8

INTERVIEW KERRY VON ERICH

BY JOHN CLARK

JC: I was wondering how you first got started in wrestling and what kind of an influence your father had on it?

KVE: My father was a great, great wrestler and like all little kids, boys want to be like their fathers, especially if they're successful. My father was really successful, he was one of the greatest promoters in the history of this sport. My brother Kevin came in first, then my brother David, and then I came in, then Mike came in, then Chris came in. But I came in because of my father and his success in the business and owning the promotion here in Dallas. That was probably the promotion that pioneered all of wrestling. If it wasn't for my father, the WWF would have never come along, or WCW or anything else, and we firmly believe in that.

JC: Your father probably trained you, but did you receive training from anybody else?

KVE: Yeah, my dad trained me in fighting. A great, great Greco-Roman wrestler from Iran named Khosrow Vaziri, who went into the WWF as the Iron Sheik, he's one of the greatest amateur wrestlers ever in our business. He helped me out a lot and I used to wrestle amateur with him, when I used to fight amateur through high school as well as through Texas and all over the United States as a young

kid. I started wrestling in elementary school, I was seven years old when I first started wrestling. I also played football at Lake Dallas High School and the University of Houston. In high school I was an All-American in football and went on to college and was an All-American in track & field and set the world record in track & field in college.

I set the world record in high school in track & field eleven different times, but that was all in the discus. In 1980 they boycotted the Olympics and I stepped out of college and right into pro wrestling.

JC: Was your father's promotion just about your favorite group to ever work for?

KVE: Yeah, but I got to say that I appreciated the WWF, I appreciate the charisma that they've added to our sport. I don't appreciate some of the showmanship they've added to it, but as far as the charisma and the gasoline they've put in it to fuel our sport, I do appreciate that.

JC: But do you think that the low houses across the country right now are due to the over-doing of the cartoon gimmicks?

KVE: In somewhat it does, but I think the overall US economy is hurting, it is down. I guarantee we go across the world, over in Paris, France, Scotland, Italy,



Germany, England, Ireland, those people are primed and ready to go. We sold out in ten hours, 80,000 tickets for SummerSlam, so the economy is okay over there.

JC: What do think is the main reason(s) World Class out of Dallas fell apart?

KVE: I think World Class fell apart because I left. It's obvious, when I went to New York (WWF), is when it went down, when it closed up. I think I'm to blame why WCCW failed, because I went to New York. Now I'm back, I'm going to work with independents and get Dallas moving again.

JC: Do you feel any guilt about the subject you just talked about?

KVE: In a way I do because it's something that my brother David, in so many words, gave his life for. My brother Mike gave his life for this business here in Dallas that we started. My brother Chris, that's all he ever wanted to do, was be in this business here in Dallas. When I stepped out and left Texas, Texas shut down, and I left my brother Kevin here. So yeah, I feel a lot of remorse and a lot of guilt for the whole thing. But Kevin stood behind me all the way, like a brother stands behind a brother. My brother's love for me is unconditional, I mean I could go out and kill a thousand nuns and a thousand presidents, and my brother Kevin is going to love me just the same as he loves me right now. I'm sure he was hurt by the whole thing, but we talked about it and Kevin's knees at the time were bothering him and he was ready to slow down off the business, and I was ready to push forward, and so I did.

JC: Why exactly did you decide to move on to the WWF?

KVE: It was just- I was starting to handle the promotion here, I was handling the booking of wrestlers, I was handling wrestlers that were unhappy with their checks, I was handling everything. I got tired of it, I said I'm a wrestler, I'm not made to sit in an office all day, then fight all night, so I went to New York. A lot of my good friends are up in Titan Sports. The Ultimate Warrior is one of my closest friends, Hulk Hogan is a good, good friend of mine, Jake the Snake, I mean a lot of those guys are very close friends to me, just like brothers to me. I decided I wanted to be with the guys that I really cared about that were still in the sport, and that's why I went to New York. I thought I might go to Titan and finish my last days in the business, but then again, as I told Vince McMahon, I'll commit for two years and that's all I will come for. I came in and stayed for two years and six months and stepped out. (The promise that Vince made to me to bring me in was) that I'd be paid right.

JC: I noticed when you first came in to the WWF that they emphasized the nickname, Texas Tornado. After a while, did they want to just have you work as the Texas Tornado and basically eliminate your name, Kerry Von Erich?

KVE: They tried to over and over and over and over again. Every tv, whenever they would say, Texas Tornado, and they didn't say Kerry Von Erich, I always stopped the tape right there and went back and said, no it's Kerry Von Erich, the Texas Tornado. But I've never let it be said on tv, just Texas Tornado. I would not leave the Von Erich name. The Von Erich gimmick is no gimmick (you don't need a gimmick). I got up there, it was just a little bit too much show for me man, just too much show. This Papa Shango stuff has just been ridiculous to me.

JC: You were scheduled to wrestle him at SummerSlam...

KVE: Yeah and that was one of the problems (why I left).

JC: Did they want to do something weird or non-wrestling type things with you at SummerSlam with Papa Shango?

KVE: Yeah, I'm really not at liberty to talk about it, but yeah they did. It was just Papa Shango stuff and certain stuff that I just didn't agree with. I had a problem with it man. I got a problem with people not believing what I do. I fight my heart out in the ring, like I said, my brothers have given their lives to this business, and for someone to think what I do is not on the up-and-up, I want to say, hey f--- you.

JC: What other reasons caused you to leave the WWF?

KVE: Yeah, well I'm going to be doing a movie and Titan wanted to get 50% of my earnings. There's a lot of things Titan tries to take 50% of, that I'm not really willing to give.

JC: Does Vince think that he made you who you are and that because of that he deserves to take half of all of your out-of-company earnings?

KVE: Yeah, except I didn't agree with that. I didn't think New York (WWF) made Kerry Von Erich any bigger than he already was when he went there. When I went to WWF, I did them a favor. That's when they asked me to come in, they were in trouble (summer of '90 collapse of house show business), they needed help, they offered me a whole lot of money, and I said, okay I'll come in.

JC: Did the WWF ever have ideas about bringing your brother Kevin in to join you?

KVE: Yeah they did. Kevin is one of the greatest wrestlers this business has ever seen, he's quicker than a cat, faster than lightning. I think WWF wanted to tone the Von Erichs down because they know the strength of my family in this business. They in so many words paid me out, bought me out, I sold out to them for two years and I didn't sell out any longer and so I came back home. Now that I'm back home, I'll be fighting with Kevin and hopefully we'll start fighting all over this country together again and take back

the belts and the Von Erich right to this business. It's time for this business to rebuild and the Von Erichs have not yet begun to fight and we're about to start.

JC: What happened when Kevin got a tryout for the WWF?

KVE: When Kevin was out there fighting, I said take a look at him, he's got everything you guys want. I think when they saw Kevin fight, it scared them. They thought wow, he might be what we're looking for. They thought, now we'll have to tone Kerry down even more, so they'll have a lot more of a problem building him back up to where they were. But I want to say that the WWF was not unfair to me, it's just that some of things they did, I didn't believe in.

JC: Turning back the clock to around February of this year, you had disappeared from the scene for a while. Could you discuss with us what happened to you?

KVE: Well, I stepped out because I went to Betty Ford. I just got locked up in pain killers and drugs. It came a time where I realized if I kept on doing drugs to keep on kicking ass and taking bumps in the ring, that it was going to finally kill me. When you start doing drugs you get lost in them. I wasn't doing drugs to party, I was doing drugs to keep myself going, keep myself well, keep injuries down, and to keep myself in the gym. I know so many people that I know are in them that are in our business. I'm one of the few, one of the very few that got help. Maybe one out of a thousand of us have stopped and got help. Whenever there's a lot of injuries involved, whenever there's a lot of heartache with death and family, you try to escape a lot, you try to medicate those feelings. You just find out you're going down a one-way street. I speak a lot now all over the United States, all over the world to kids on leadership, goals, Jesus Christ, drugs, friends, family, and everything else. But I would not know about the problems with drugs if I didn't deal with drugs, I would not know all the problems with death if I didn't deal with death, I would not know the problems in family without dealing with family problems. Those are all a gift from God, although they're a very misconceptionized gift, they are a gift, because I did learn from them, and anything you learn from is a gift. (After my motorcycle accident) that's whenever I started getting access to a lot of pain killers and stuff. But it was way before then. The death of David, just almost killed me, I almost blew my f_____ head off, when David died, in fact I would've been happy too. My brother Kevin felt the same way, my brother David was our whole world, he was one of the brothers. Then my brother Mike killed himself and that ended my world again. Then my brother Chris, who idolized me in everything I did, he always wanted to be like me, and always told me, Kerry man, you got everything, how come, why do you have everything? I used to tell Chris, you got things that I want too, like the ability to laugh at things and your ability to draw and the ability you have with your hands and to love, just your ability to love alone, is something I value and wish I had, but he always

wanted my athletic ability. But I don't care who you are, what you are, or what you think you are, the grass is always greener over someone else's fence, it's always greener somewhere else. These baseball players are making a million bucks, and I'm making a million also, we're both making a million, but then again, he's playing baseball, I wonder what baseball is like, and so you want to try something else, you want to do something else. That's the way my brother Chris was to me, really that's the way all the brothers are. I mean I envy Kevin's values as far as his quickness in the ring, his love for children, I envy that. I envy David's ability for his love that he gave other people and his love for the state of Texas. Mike, I envy his ideas, his sense of humor, his strength, his willpower, I envy that. But, it's not nothing I would take from them, but it's something that when they died, I took out of them and tried to put into myself. Anytime I took the world championship, my brothers were never, oh no, Kerry got it again, they were never that way, they were on my side. They never said, hey Kerry, slow down, back off the pace a little bit and give Kevin, David, Mike a chance to get into the limelight, it was, hey man, go for it. Who ever is in the press is who's doing the time, I just did a lot more at the time than they did.

JC: What was actually happening to you mentally when you got arrested?

KVE: It was all out of depression. It was all out of being out of control. Thank God it happened because if it didn't, I'd be dead, I really would. Thank God for Betty Ford, and for so many other things that pulled me out of the drug world. Vince McMahon was the one who helped me go to Betty Ford, straightened me out in that way, and so that's why I can't sit here and say, yeah they're a bunch of rip-offs, a bunch of thieves, a terrible show, cause I'll never say that against them.

JC: Then, what was really good of them, after they got you the help, they brought you back in...

KVE: Oh they sure did. Vince has totally supported me in that. I don't have a problem with that, I just had a problem with... I'm a idealistic kind of person when it comes to my business and my business is keep people believing. I don't believe in telling five, six, seven year old kids that there's no Santa Claus. I don't believe in going out and telling people that our business not for real, I believe that our business is something that we've all fought our guts out for, and we'll die for it. My dad has given it his total help to this business, Gene Kiniski, Joe Blanchard, Johnny Valentine, Buddy Rogers, these guys have made our business for real, have given their total lives for it. I'll be damned if I'm going to be one of them who lays down and says our lives aren't worth s___ and that this is just how it is. I'll tell you what, money is the key motivation in our business until you sit back and look at the values. I'm second generation, my father was a fighter, I live be-

cause of this business, I survive because of this business. People who just come walking in off the street, and say I want to be a wrestler and become a wrestler and because they're big and goofy looking, Vince makes them a big, big star, and they never paid their dues. They never went through it as a kid being beat up in school because some kid says your dad is a fake, I mean I had to kick his ass, and I got my ass kicked over and over again. So we learned to care and respect and do anything we can to keep this business alive. I got my ass kicked too many times because I was trying to make other people believe. I will, on my deathbed, swear that this business is real. Just remember, WWF is sports entertainment, but it's time to go back to the old school and protecting our business and working our ass off in the ring and doing whatever it takes to take our business back to the top, and put on the skills and the motivation, and the desire, and the love, and the needs that this business has got to have in order for it to survive forever. If you want it to go ten years, then the WWF is it, but if you want to make it go forever, WWF isn't it.

JC: Am I talking to Bill Watts? You really seem to have the same opinions that he has and I agree totally with you as the WWF is only a short-run success, which may already have ended or is ending soon. Is anything going on between you and Bill Watts?

KVE: Well, Bill Watts and my father were very close as far as business-wise goes. Bill Watts is now like a God, he believes in God, he reads the Bible, and I talked to him on the phone the other day. I was very impressed with the way he sounded, he is trying to bring our business back to the way it should be and the way it should've never gone away from. I got total respect for the WCW and for what they're trying to do, whether they do or not, I don't know, maybe that's up to my brother Kevin and I, we'll find out. So we're just going to go out there, it's time to blacken a few eyes and break a few shoulders and break a few ribs to get the business back to the way it used to be, and that's what we're going to do.

JC: Could you be joining Bill Watts in his crusade to bring wrestling back to the way it should be?

KVE: My brother Kevin and I think we might want to start Dallas back up, I'm probably going to work for Baba (New Japan Pro-Wrestling) for a while. I'm not sure man, I just got to let my heart lead me and do it in the faith of God and in the faith of my brother Kevin. So I don't know, I might go to WCW, I know the conditions have to be right. I know whatever decision I make will be the right one. I'm not going to make a move without Kevin though.

JC: Was Kevin wanting to come in the WWF to be with you when you were there?

KVE: No, Kevin was trying really hard to stay out of it. I was trying to get him in, he was trying to stay out. I said

come on in Kevin, it's killer money up here, and he was saying, come on Kerry, it really sucks up there.

JC: You seem to now have all of your priorities and your values in order, did the Betty Ford clinic help you see these things?

KVE: These values were already there, but values that I lost because of being in drugs, I've always had these values, it's just that drugs takes away a lot of values, a lot of pride people have inside. It's painful and very sad to see, but that's just the way it is. Here's a stat for you man, only of everybody that has ever gotten into drugs, only 5% ever have gotten out. Drugs make you a liar, a cheater, a thief, and everything else. My marriage stayed strong through the whole thing, what broke us up was trials and the deaths of brothers over and over again, it's losing the sight of values, things like that. She is like begging me to come back brother. She's on her knees saying, please come back, please come back! I'm saying get away babe, I'm busy. But that ain't how I feel, it's a sad thing anytime a divorce is being done, but it's something I had to do.

JC: How did you feel about being on the road as much as you were when you were with the WWF?

KVE: When I'm on the road, I'm very much to myself. I go from the airport to the hotel, I eat, I go to the gym and train, then I go back to my hotel room and I just cool out before the fight.

JC: How did your family react when they found out about the problems that you were going through?

KVE: They were very supportive, they were ready to see me get off drugs. They knew that it was a one-way street to nowhere. Everybody thought that I would be the next one (of the Von Erich brothers) to die. The big news story hit my mom and dad here and they called them while I was out of the country and said that I hung myself. My mom and dad really flipped out, my brother Kevin heard it too, and Kevin believed it, and my mom and dad believed it totally. In fact, my dad went to one ranch, my mom went to the other ranch, and all my dad's Christian friends gathered around my father and stayed by his side, then thinking that I had committed suicide. Then I came back into the country and I called my father, and I'll never forget the sound of his voice. One of his friends answered the phone and his friend said, Jack, it's Kerry. My dad's first sound of his voice was, Nooooo! He said, son, son, son, are you okay? He couldn't believe it, he didn't have words, it was like someone's son coming back to life. You've got to remember, I had so many brothers commit suicide that all of a sudden, when we hear that stuff, we believe it first, and then we don't believe it second, cause you don't get that second chance. It was really something, but it was on all the news here in Texas and on all the radio programs that I had killed myself. Until I got back in the country and they saw

that I was alive, all the channels, channel 8, channel 4, and channel 5, everybody retracted that I killed myself. It was on all the radio stations and everything.

JC: That is one thing that I have noticed, that your hometown and around the Dallas area is really behind you and your family. That was quite evident at the funeral of your brother David, because the whole Dallas area was in shock and filled with sadness.

KVE: When my brother David died, the funeral was bigger than the Kennedy funeral. The police department, the helicopters and the motorcycles, they stopped all the traffic on the highway going to David's grave sight. It was incredible, it was a great, great feeling. There was a lot of people who felt like they lost a brother. You've got to remember, my brothers and I competed in high school and college, and everything we did was put on tv. Every time I scored a high school touchdown, it was on the news. They used to call my football team, not Lake Dallas Football Team, they called it Adkisson (the real name of all the Von Erichs) & Company in the newspaper. That made me feel good, it showed me that my state was behind me.



Kerry Von Erich recently quit the WWF in mid-July and is happily looking forward to working the independents, Japan, and possibly join Bill Watts in the WCW. The Wrestling Flyer wishes him the best in whatever he decides to do and we thank him for offering his views and opinions to us.